



**Testimony of Shawn M. Lang
Public Health Committee
14 March 2014
SB 257**

Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, and members of the committee; I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. I'm Shawn M. Lang, the Director of Public Policy with the AIDS CT, Connecticut's only statewide HIV/AIDS organization. We work to ensure that the 10,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in our state have the housing, care and supportive services they need in order to live their lives in dignity.

I'm here to lend my support to SB 257, An Act Concerning Hepatitis C Testing with friendly substitute language for Section 1, #1, lines 3 – 4, "Hepatitis C screening test" means a laboratory test that detects the presence of hepatitis C virus antibodies in the blood;."

We suggest the following - "Hepatitis C screening test" shall mean any FDA-approved laboratory screening test, FDA-approved rapid point-of-care test, or other FDA-approved tests that detect the presence of hepatitis C antibodies in the blood."

There are a tremendous number of parallels between HIV and Hep C. Routine assessment and screening of Hepatitis C in baby boomers, like routine HIV testing, helps to identify people who are infected and may be completely unaware of their status, all the while Hepatitis is wreaking havoc on their liver and other systems, which, eventually, can lead to cancer or, if left untreated, death. Early detection and care of Hep C results in much better health outcomes, and easily demonstrates far greater savings over time. While the cost of treatment can be pricey (\$80,000 per course of treatment) it is far less expensive than treating liver disease over time, and a fraction of the cost of a liver transplant (\$575,000)

Co-infection of HIV and Hep C is common (50 – 90%, according to the CDC) among HIV positive injecting drug users. A recent CT research study conducted by Drs. Laretta Grau and Robert Heimer from Yale found that 40.5% of the participants (n=462) in the study were Hep C+, and of those, only 43% (78) were aware of their status.

The CT Department of Public Health, has been forward thinking on this topic for some time. DPH funds three syringe exchange programs, one of which is a program of AIDS CT. They routinely offer Hep C and HIV screening and testing, and because they're with the client at the time of the results, are able to immediately refer someone to care.

The treatments for Hep C have vastly improved over the years and new medications have very recently been approved for use. These new treatments have much fewer side effects, a shorter treatment regimen, and a 90-100% cure rate in most people.

Please support SB 257 so that we can detect Hepatitis C early on, and save lives.

Thank you.

I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.